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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000022

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BA](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [BILAT](#) [CTR](#) [OFFICIALS](#)

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER DISCUSSES SECURITY ISSUES WITH  
NAVCENT COMMANDER

REF: IIR 5 399 0002 06

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Begin Summary: Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid praised the strong historic relationship between the governments of Bahrain and the United States during his December 20 meeting with NAVCENT Commander Vice Admiral Walsh. Senior MOI officials provided a comprehensive brief discussing the structure and responsibilities of the Ministry in the context of Bahrain's overall security environment. Progress on the establishment of the Joint Counter-Terrorism Center (JCTC) was reviewed and the Admiral expressed his support and commitment to assist in the Center's development. The Ministry brief highlighted improvements in the training levels and overall effectiveness of Bahraini staff in the use of newly installed scanning devices, while officials expressed confidence that the system, undergoing continued improvements, was fully operational. End summary.

2. (C) Vice Admiral Patrick Walsh, the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Fleet, accompanied by the Charge, paid an introductory call on Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa to discuss bilateral relations and security related issues. Also present during this meeting were Undersecretary Shaikh Daij bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa, Public Security Chief Abdullatif Rashid Al-Zayani, and Assistant Chief of Police for Operations and Training, Col. Tariq Bin Dana.

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POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP  
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3. (C) The Minister began the meeting by stressing the positive relationship and the excellent cooperation shown between the U.S. and Bahraini governments and the important role of the U.S. Navy in this potentially volatile region. He assured the Admiral of his continued support and expressed the hope and desire that military families would soon return to Bahrain. The Admiral offered his thanks to the Minister and expressed praise for the levels of support and transparent cooperation between the two nations. He added he was hopeful military dependents would return soon and was developing a better understanding of the overall threat environment in Bahrain as well as the concrete steps that have been taken by both the U.S. and Bahrain officials since the departure of dependents to improve security in the country.

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STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR  
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4. (C) General Al-Zayani, Chief of Public Security, then provided an in-depth briefing on the structure of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and his role as the Chief of Public Security, which incorporates police units, including air wing, special forces, and Coast Guard elements. The General discussed the various external and internal factors affecting the changing role of the MOI and reviewed the regional governorates and their individual responsibilities. He also reviewed continuing programs to modernize the entire force, suggesting Bahrain's fledgling democracy has created the need for change and the development of sensitive policing agendas that address the issues of terrorism, civil disorder and natural disasters. One such program includes the recent development of a community policing program. To date. the program has graduated 190 new officers, with 80 currently undergoing training. The Ministry hopes to have in excess of 500 officers in 2006 and suggested the initial public reaction has been positive. The General also reviewed ongoing training efforts and discussed the Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program in Bahrain. A copy of the entire presentation was provided to the Admiral following the meeting.

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JOINT COUNTER TERRORISM CENTER  
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15. (C) During the briefing, the Charge asked about the status of the planned JCTC, sometimes referred to as the Counter Terrorism Operation Center (CTOC). General Al-Zayani stated the MOI had identified a facility which was currently undergoing renovations to house the Center. He added equipment needs had been identified and orders processed, and all staffing positions had been established and filled. He added it was hoped the Center would be operational as early as February 2006 and was hoping for the establishment of a liaison officer from the U.S. Embassy at that time. Minister Rashid went on to explain ongoing efforts to establish the JCTC and the various needs associated with its development. This included Bahrain efforts to upgrade the country's communications network to ensure proper connectivity with the JCTC. The MOI has conducted comprehensive surveys to review software and computer needs for automated databases and has approached British officials on establishing a presence in the JCTC and to provide a regional database on explosive incidents and materials.

16. (C) The Admiral expressed his strong support for the Center and offered his assistance, and that of NCIS, in providing valuable start-up assistance. The Minister reiterated the strong relationship already established between U.S. Naval (NCIS) officials and the MOI and welcomed the offer. General Al-Zayani offered several examples of the close levels of cooperation to include recent joint drug and credit card fraud cases, and the assignment of host government liaison officers for all U.S./coalition ship visits. The Minister then expressed his openness to the presence of NCIS staff in any Joint Counter Terrorism Center established in Bahrain.

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CAUSEWAY CONCERNS  
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17. (C) The Charge then asked about the status and effectiveness of the vehicle scanning equipment that was installed last year along the Causeway. (Note: Previous reporting suggested that there were difficulties operating the equipment bringing into question its effectiveness. As reported in reftel, the February 2005 installation of a vehicle scanning system was to ensure the safety of all cargo shipments transiting through Bahrain and to increase the efficiency of the security verification process at the Causeway. The Causeway is Bahrain's only land link with the Arabian Peninsula and serves as a major point of entry and thoroughfare for upwards of 400 trucks entering Bahrain daily. Initial start-up problems led to the suggestion the wrong equipment was installed or the equipment was somehow defective. End note.)

18. (C) Minister Rashid explained that he believed the initial difficulties were simply caused by the lack of training and experience of the operating staff assigned to the unit. General Al-Zayani went on to suggest training levels have increased significantly and the developing expertise of the staff has greatly enhanced the equipment's operational effectiveness. He added that contract officials from Britain recently visited the Causeway and will be providing additional recommendations to the GOB to improve screening procedures along the Causeway. The Minister's views were similar to those recently expressed to Embassy officials by the British DCM in Bahrain who is familiar with the scanning system.

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NEXT STEPS  
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19. (C) General Al-Zayani wrapped-up the briefing with an explanation of ongoing efforts to improve security services and provided recommendations for future growth. Procedural guidelines for the security services are continuously being updated, there have been recent reviews conducted to improve security at the airport and causeway, training programs have been expanded upon and the level of interaction between the U.S. government and Bahrain in the area of training and intelligence sharing has increased steadily. The General added Bahrain has established a National Emergency Control Center and purchased secure digital communications networks to improve security operations. Moves to install Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) monitoring systems and improving Bahrain's coastal radar network to track vessels is also a priority for the MOI.

10. (C) Shaikh Rashid closed the meeting by reiterating that Bahrain's Coast Guard needed more training as well as additional patrol boats. General Al-Zayani added that efforts are underway to improve the capabilities of the Coast Guard with the purchase of additional patrol boats (up to 11 at an estimated cost of 20 million) similar to those recently purchased by neighboring Gulf States.  
ZIADEH